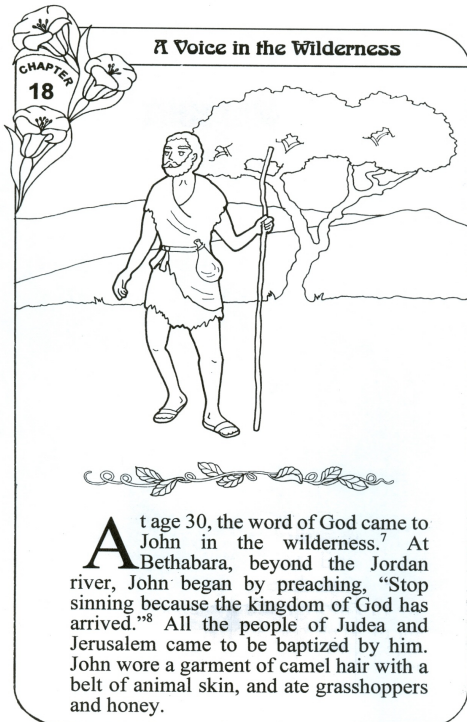


Part II - Jesus' Ministry Begins

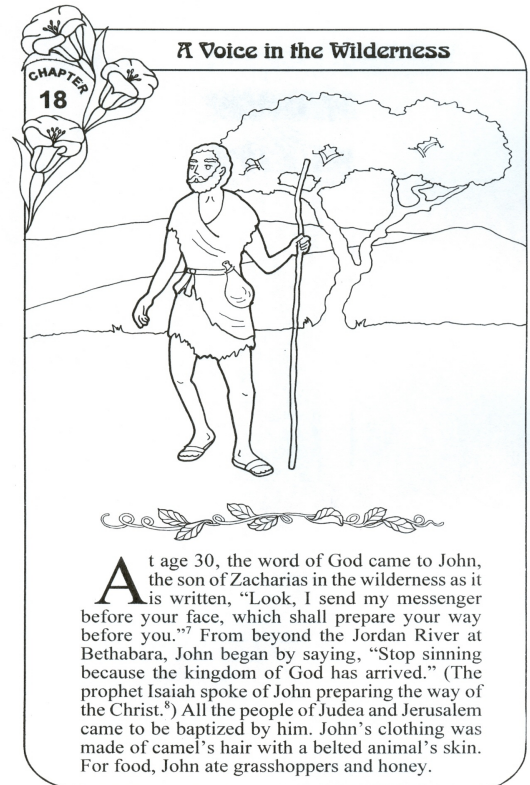
Pre-school - 5th Grade



At age 30, the word of God came to John in the wilderness.⁷ At Bethabara, beyond the Jordan river, John began by preaching, "Stop sinning because the kingdom of God has arrived."⁸ All the people of Judea and Jerusalem came to be baptized by him. John wore a garment of camel hair with a belt of animal skin, and ate grasshoppers and honey.

Matthew 03:01-12 / Mark 01:01-08 / Luke 03:01-18 / John 01:19-28 Teaching Guide (Map 1)
⁷ Malachi 3:1,
⁸ Isaiah 40:3.
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Youth Ministry "First Steps"



At age 30, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness as it is written, "Look, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you."⁷ From beyond the Jordan River at Bethabara, John began by saying, "Stop sinning because the kingdom of God has arrived." (The prophet Isaiah spoke of John preparing the way of the Christ.⁸) All the people of Judea and Jerusalem came to be baptized by him. John's clothing was made of camel's hair with a belted animal's skin. For food, John ate grasshoppers and honey.

Matthew 03:01-12 / Mark 01:01-08 / Luke 03:01-18 / John 01:19-28 Teaching Guide (Map 1)
⁷ Malachi 3:1,
⁸ Isaiah 40:3.
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1.

A Voice in the Wilderness

"Bible Notes" – A Summary Study Guide

As the gospel of Mark begins Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas shared power, even though Caiaphas was high priest. Then the Word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness, as it is written in the prophets, "Behold, I send My messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you" (Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:2).

Born with the spirit of Elijah, John came into all the countryside about the Jordan River. [Here the prophet Elijah had gone up into heaven on a chariot of fire (see 2 Kings 9-11).] John preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2).

John was the person about whom the prophet Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 40:3) "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). John's clothing was made from camel's hair with an animal skin belt. For food John ate grasshoppers, which were high in protein, and honey.



People came from Jerusalem, other parts of Judea and every other region around the Jordan River. They were all baptized by John, confessing their sins. Seeing a group of Pharisees and Sadducees approaching, John called them, "A generation of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). When the people heard John's words, they asked, "What shall we do?"

John instructed, "The man with two coats should share with him who has none. The one who has food should do the same."

Then publicans (hated tax collectors) came forward and asked, "Master, what should we do?"

John replied, "Collect only what is required."

Finally soldiers asked and were told, "Hurt no man, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

To answer the challenge of the Pharisees, John testified of Jesus the Christ, saying, "I baptize you with water. But One more powerful than I will come, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His barns, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable" (Luke 3:16-17).

John preached many other things in his exhortation to the people. Then John moved to Bethabara, the ancient ford of the Jordan on the eastern side nearly opposite the city of Jericho. Six months had passed since John had first appeared.

Sermon#18, Biblical Scriptures:

Gospel of Matthew:

1. In THOSE days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2. saying, "Repent you, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Elijah, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare you the way of the Lord, ' make his paths straight. 4. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle about his waist, and his meat was locusts and wild honey. 5. Then went out to him those from Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about the Jordan river, 6. And were baptized of him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8. Bring forth therefore fruits meant for repentance. 9. And think not to say within yourselves, "We have Abraham to our father. For I say to your, that

God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10. And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire.

11. I indeed baptize you with water to repentance, but he that comes after me is mightier than I whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. 12. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the barns, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Gospel of Mark:

1. THE BEGINNING of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; 2. As it is written in the prophets, "Behold, I send my messenger before you face, which shall prepare your way before you. 3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the

remission of sins. 5. And there went out to him all the land of Judea and those of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him the river of the Jordan, confessing their sins. 6. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his waist, and he did eat locusts and wild honey. 7. And preached, saying, "There comes one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." 8. I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Gospel of Luke:

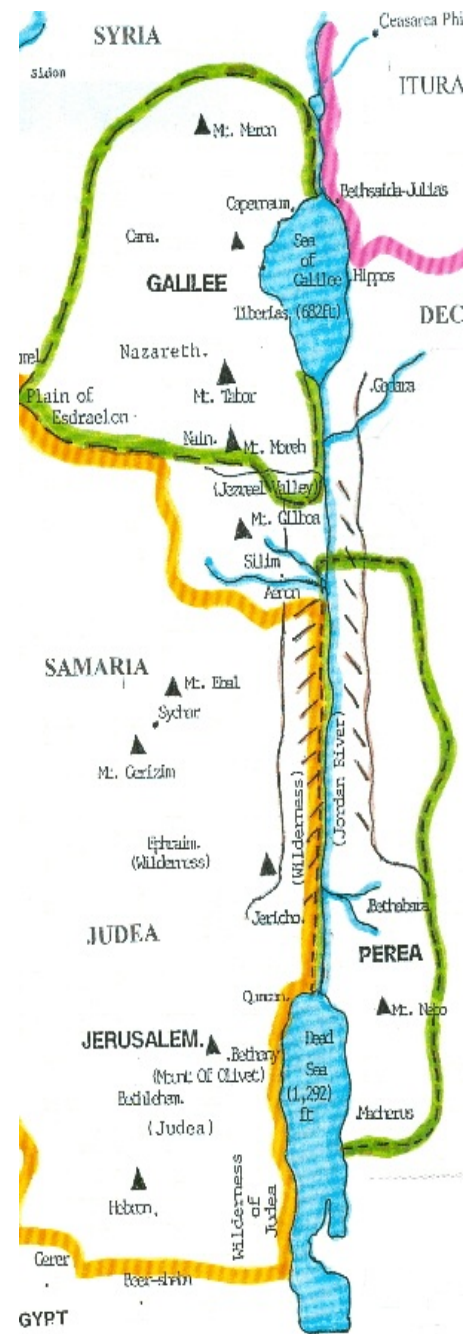
1. Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 2. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the Wilderness. 3. And he came

into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 4. As it is written in the book of the words of Elijah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. 6. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. 7. Then said John to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" 8. Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father,' for I say to you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9. And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees, every tree therefore which doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. 10. And the people asked him saying, "What shall we do then?" 11. He answered and said to them, "He that has two coats, let him give to him that has none. And he that has meat, let him do likewise. 12. Then came also publicans [tax collectors] to be baptized, and said to him, "Master, what shall we do?" 13. And John told them, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." 14. Next soldier also demanded, asking, "What shall we do?" And John answered, "Hurt no person, neither accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." 15. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he was the Christ, or not. 16. John answered, saying to all of them, "I indeed baptize

you with water, but one mightier than I comes, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire. 17. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his barns, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18. And many other things in the exhortation preached he to the people.

Gospel fo John:

19. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "who are you?" 20. And he confessed, and denied nothing, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21. And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah? And he said, "I am not." Are you that prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22. Then said they asked John, "Who are you? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What say you about yourself?" 23. John said, "I am the voice of once crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Elijah. 24. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. 25. And they asked him and said to him, "Why baptize you then, if you be not the Christ, nor Elijah, neither that prophet? 26. John answered them saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands one among you, whom you know not. 27. He it is, whose coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. 28. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan [river], where John was baptizing.



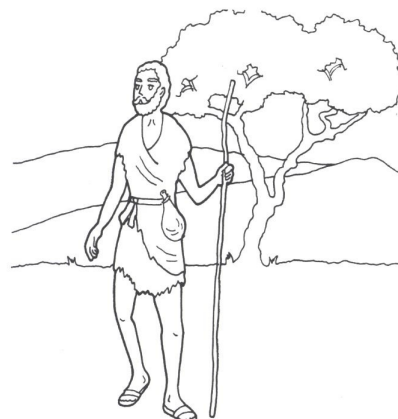
1.

A Voice in the Wilderness
(Mark's Gospel Begins)

“EMMANUEL”

[Jesus, the Promised Messiah]

In 25 A.D., it was the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, the stepson of Augustus and second emperor of Rome. He was surnamed Claudius Nero and born in Rome on the sixteenth day of November B.C. 45. He died at age 78, after a reign of 23 years. During this time Pontius Pilate became the sixth Roman governor of Judea. [Better known as a procurator, an imperial appointment, he was an agent of the Roman emperor whose primary function was to look after the provincial interests of the emperor. Such a position came with the authority to sentence individuals to death. Pilate would make Caesarea the capital of the province of Judea (a role it would play for the next 500 years), and therefore it was the headquarters for the Roman legions. Pilate would make Herod the Great palace the governor's residence in Caesarea. The city of Jerusalem laid only 70 miles to the northeast and a forced march could easily put the might of the Roman legions at the city within two to three days.]



This was the political landscape of the Promised Land according to Luke's gospel. Herod Antipas, who held a fourth portion of his father's kingdom, was Tetrarch, a minor king. His territories included Galilee and Perea. (see Map 3) His brother Philip was Tetrarch of Ituraea, a small province north of the Sea of Galilee along the base of Mount Hermon and Trachonitis a Roman province to the northeast between Galilee and Damascus. Lysanias was the Tetrarch of Abilene a city nineteen miles northwest of Damascus in the Barada valley. (see Luke 3:1)

Pontius Pilate's insensitive administration would nearly drive the Jews to riot on two or three occasions. One of the first acts of the Prefect was to relocate the headquarters of the Roman army from Caesarea on the Mediterranean coastline to Jerusalem. He had murals of the Emperor's face brought by night into Israel's golden capitol and erected them in the Holy Temple. Pilate was prepared to slay the Jews if they protested; but the Jews offered their necks to him and complained to Tiberius. They hated this "Gentile." They won this battle and the pictures were removed. It was Herod Antipas who had brought the Jewish protest to Rome and was presumably one of the main reasons for the friction, which existed between the Prefect of Judea and Galilee. Pilate's hard-line policy treated the Jews with cruelty cruelly and any Jewish uprisings would be suppressed with extremely violent retaliation.

Pilate's wife was named Claudia. She was the youngest daughter of Julia, the daughter of Caesar Augustus. Claudia's mother, on her third marriage to Tiberius Caesar, the emperor of Rome, became pregnant by a Roman Knight and conceived Claudia. For the adulterous art, she was exiled, and Julia knew that living in exile, Claudia would never prosper. Reaching age 13, Julia sent Claudia to be raised by Tiberius, who now welcomed her as his own. When Claudia was 16, she met Pontius Pilate, who was a man of low origin. He asked Tiberius for her hand in marriage and the emperor complied. As a result, Pilate was appointed the procurator or Governor of Judea. [*Author's Reflections:* The word "procurator" or Governor is better phrased as Perfect, which gave Pontius Pilate more power including the power to sentence a person to death.]

Roman law forbids the wives of Prefects to accompany their husbands while on duty. Most politicians liked this arrangement, but not Pilate. Only after six months at Jerusalem, he sent for Claudia, who was overjoyed to join her husband.

At age thirty, believed in the spring, the word of the LORD God came upon John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. John emerged from the wilderness near the southern portion of the Jordan River. [Here the prophet Elijah had gone up into heaven on a chariot of fire (see 2 Kings 9-11).] He proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Matthew 3:2**) John preached repentance to take away sin, and his ministry of baptism drew many people. As news reached Jerusalem, people poured out of the city along with all of Judea and the regions around the Jordan River. Then as the people arrived John waded into the Jordan confessed their sins and baptized them. John's popularity blossomed.

John's many years in the wilderness made his appearance quite rugged. The sun had baked his skin to bronze leather and he appeared much older than his thirty years. Resembling Isaiah, John wore a camel's hair garment with a leather belt around his waist. John's food consisted of locusts⁵⁹ and wild honey.

Meanwhile, at Jerusalem, Joseph Caiaphas (whose actual stone coffin was uncovered in modern day Israel,) served as the High Priest and his father-in-law Annas presided as president of the Sanhedrin Counsel, the nation's ruling religious body. (see Luke 3:2) Alarmed over reports of John the Baptist, Caiaphas and Anna took counsel to discuss the burning problem at hand. Gathering with the chief priest, Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees, they knew something had to be done to stop the people from thinking of this mad man as a prophet, or even worst, the Christ. As a result, Caiaphas and Annas sent members of the acting 24 classes of priests on duty at Jerusalem and temple stewards called Levites to ask about John's identity.

Pontius Pilate took the Roman response to John's arrival much differently. Although he put his troops on full alert at the start of the Hermit prophet's movement, no direct action was ever recorded or taken. Apparently, Pilate realized the frustration that John's appearance had caused the Jewish leadership, which he delighted in. So watching from a distance, Rome's strong arm would merely monitor the situation. After all, Jewish bandits and freedom fighters still roamed throughout the Promised Land. (No doubt, Pilate did have spy keep a journal of John's movement, which Claudia was, privilege to. Later this record keeping would be extended to a second new comer named Jesus of Nazareth.)

Leaving Jerusalem, the delegation rounded the Mount of Olives and journeyed past the village of Bethany. The Twenty-four mile descent through the wilderness of Judea was before them remain before they could lodged the night among the palm trees surrounding Jericho or in the Jewish sector of the city. The following morning, the group continued twelve miles east to the Jordan River. After crossing the Jordan, the group traveled twelve more miles down this tributary of the Jordan to Bethabara.

In the afternoon, well-dressed priests confronted John about his identity. They asked, "Are you the Christ, Elijah or a prophet?" John denied being any of them. They asked, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (**John 1:23**) Two days later, the returning priests and Levites reported to Caiaphas and Anna what John had said. But the hermit's reply of being Elijah preparing a way for the Christ any further upset these men. A heated debate on what to do next began within the Sanhedrin counsel.

[*Author's Reflections:* Born in the spirit of Elijah, it's surmised that John the Baptist realized the defiant state of the Jewish religious community toward accepting him and the time of the Messiah' visitation. Looking into the future, it's clearly verified by John's own words that this great hermit prophet must have felt this rejection would cause "Elijah's Office" to be fully completed at a later time before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. One such person claiming to be "A Voice crying in the Wilderness" was Herbert W. Armstrong. His ministry restored the telling of the 1st century Gospel of Jesus Christ. Following his death in 1986, the true gospel message once again was forgotten by the church in the "Great Falling Away" as prophesied,⁶⁰ leading to the End of Days. Rather than the Lord's gospel, man's self promotional and carefully written fables, today's sermons, would be blindly (Matt. 15:14, 7:13-14) preached to satisfy the wishful thing of people. Yet, if the Jewish people would accept Jesus of Nazareth on his famous ride into Jerusalem some 3 ½ years away, all would have been forgiven and fulfilled (see John 12:31-32; Luke 19:41-44.)]

⁵⁹ A winged grasshopper three inches long, very high in protein and free of disease.

⁶⁰ Amos 2:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

At Bethabara, which is beyond the Jordan River in Perea, the people had flowed from Jerusalem, Judea and all the surrounding regions to see John. Over the weeks and months that followed, news of John the Baptist's arrival spread like wild fire throughout the Promised Land of Canaan. John's message even reached Galilee and the village of Nazareth where a young carpenter's heart began to burn with anticipation as each day slowly passed inside Joseph's shop and at home.

On the Sea of Galilee at the city of Bethsaida a young man named Philip was greatly inspired by the news of John the Baptist. So Philip left home and began a three-day journey down the lake's shoreline for the Jordan River and Bethabara. His friend Andrew and his older brother Simon most likely accompanied him. These brothers were successful fishermen and Simon owned a couple of fishing boats. Hearts filled with pride and joy, the group entered the Ghor valley seeking their dream of joining the Hermit prophet as disciples.

Yet resistance to John's steadily growing movement over the past six month was building at Jerusalem. John's movement had begun with small group of people crossing the Jordan River collecting into hundreds, the hundreds into thousands and the thousands into tens of thousands. So a delegation of Pharisees and Sadducees were now dispatched to look into the matter concerning this man, who they beheld as an imposter and a lunatic. So disturbing was the matter concerning a possible Messianic figure, that these two sects, bitter enemies, temporarily put aside their hatred for one another. So the two day forty-eight mile journey to Bethabara was completed.

As the hermit's popularity mushroomed, a second delegation from Jerusalem arrived. When John saw this group of Pharisees and Sadducees, he said to the multitude, "You generation of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise children to Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." **(Matthew 3:7-10)**

When the multitude heard John's stinging words, they asked, "What shall we do?" John answered, "The man with two coats should share with him who has none. The one who has food should do the same. Tax collectors shouldn't collect any more than they are required to. Soldiers shouldn't extort money and accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." Everyone's heart pondered the possibility of John being the Christ, as expectations flourished.

Then Pharisees stepped forward and asked John, "Why do you baptize if you be not the Christ, nor Elijah neither that prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to thoroughly separate the righteous for his coming kingdom. But he will burn sinners with unquenchable fire." **(Luke 3:16,17)**

As a result, the various groups sent from Jerusalem could only report that John had denied being the Christ, Elijah or a prophet and merely claimed that he baptized the people with water. But they did warn that he spoke of another that was coming! Six months had passed since John had first appeared. Meanwhile, thousands throughout each city, village and hamlet of the Promised Land of Canaan were leaving their homes and businesses and flocking to beyond the river Jordan to Bethabara. This was the ancestral land of the tribe of Gad.

[Author's Reflections: Being the forerunner of the Christ, John in the spirit of Elijah would maintain a water ministry on the outskirts, as he would avoid the mainstream of Jewish life by staying away from their towns and cities. That mission would clearly be left to the so to be arriving unknown Christ.]